

tures of the light, went to bed immediately—Zerneen to dream of her dangerous affair with the flower-girl, and Eola to think, long and sadly, over the dark mystery of her young life, and the singular fate which separated her from one whom nature would have taught her to love and honour, but whom man forbade her even to acknowledge.

Poor child! the flowers were already withering on her new path. She had come to London in the fond hope of meeting with her parent; that hope had been realised; she had met him in the very outset; and what good had she derived therefrom? None! only a more chilling sense of the social abyss which separated them; only a more settled conviction of the impossibility of crossing that abyss. And yet there came a ray of happiness amid the clouds of these dismal reflections. She had seen him—had heard him speak—had felt his heart beating against her own. Oh! there was joy—deep joy in these fond remembrances!

And where is there a human breast so steeped in sorrow as to be insensible to a single hope, be it ever so fragile?

Eola was not thirteen. At that age the heart floats buoyantly over the sea of life, rising triumphantly in its youthful vigor over ways of anguish which to an older voyager would perhaps be overwhelming and fatal.

And in the child's imagination rose up yet another picture, which conveyed to her pure soul an antidote for grief. It was but a shadowy creation of her sensitive mind, but it brought with it a genial radiance which illuminated that mind, casting into the shade of forgetfulness its darker phantoms of unrest.

That picture was Elwyn's.

His manly tenderness had too surely won to him her guileless heart. She knew not the meaning of the word love, as understood among the world's children; but she knew that the strange passion which now pervaded her breast was one hitherto unknown to it. And the artless girl brooded over and nursed her charming phantasy with all the freedom of an innocent mind, that saw not a darker side to the picture over which it lingered.

CHAPTER XIII.

A week passed quickly away. That week was dedicated to pleasure—or, at least, to what the little children of the tent termed pleasure—which to them consisted in walking up and down the crowded streets, gazing in the shop-windows, playing round the fountains, and perambulating the Lowther Arcade.

The latter place furnished them on rainy days with an infinite amount of delight.

The week had passed pleasantly and happily. They had not quarrelled more than once a day throughout it, and had even begun to think they might eventually agree entirely.

Their little stock of money still seemed inexhaustible. They had made several small purchases—toys, books, clothes, &c.; and though these made great inroads on their fortune, yet Zerneen said 'it would last until they got something to do,' which 'something,' however, by a singular oversight, they forgot to look for.

Well, as we before stated, a week passed pleasantly away; but now 'a change came o'er the spirit of their dream.' They were separated.

One morning Eola complained of a severe headache, and in the afternoon laid down on the bed and went to sleep, Zerneen obligingly consenting to remain at home with her. But, after vainly striving to amuse herself in different ways about the dull room, and finding Eola had fallen into a peaceful nap, the girl thought there would be no harm in just leaving her for a few minutes alone, while she ran out to purchase a picture-book, or something of the sort, with which to occupy the tedious hours, and so she attired herself, and sallied forth on her errand.

She was just about to enter a shop in a quiet street, not far from that in which they were lodging, when a large mob at one end of the thoroughfare attracted her attention, and drew her from her purposed mission to ascertain what was going on to call together such a number of people. On pushing her way through a portion of the crowd, she found that it was occasioned by a street conjurer, who, in the centre of the admiring circle of spectators, was performing his numerous juggles.

Of course this species of entertainment was nothing new to Zerneen, who had witnessed feats of the kind at almost every fair she had frequented; but still she lingered to look at the present performer, though rather

as a critic to detect imperfections, than to admire his devices.

But the man had gone through the best part of his tricks before she had arrived upon the scene, and soon began to gather up his implements preparatory to removing to some other spot. Zerneen thought she should like to witness the first part of the performance, 'just to see if the London man swallowed knives, and ate hot cinders, as well as others she had seen;' and so, joining in with the motley throng that usually forms the procession of such an exhibition, she followed the bent of her inclination.

But the pursuit of this new diversion impelled her to wander a great deal further from home than she had at first intended.

The man did not stop to perform again till he reached the bottom of St. James Street, where he re-commenced his labors.

Zerneen seeing an iron railing on one side of the street, near the spot where the conjurer had taken up his position, and thinking it would prove an excellent stand, and enable her to see better what was going on, deliberately perched herself upon it, standing on the small bar as comfortably and as much at ease as she would have stood anywhere else; never noticing that her elevated and singular position rendered her the object of general remark and attention.

A little man, of foreign appearance, was passing the crowd, without staying to devote more than a cursory glance at the conjurer as he threaded his way, when suddenly he caught sight of Zerneen; and the curiosity that had failed to be aroused by the wonders of slight-of-hand, seemed excited to the utmost by the young and pretty gipsy-girl.

There was another person standing by, who seemed to take a more than common interest in the girl. This was a handsomely-dressed, good-looking woman, of about forty, who stood staring at the child with the most profound admiration; scrutinising every feature in her face, and every point in her figure, with minute attention.

Unconscious of the marked surveillance of these two persons, Zerneen continued her occupation of watching the juggler until he had concluded his performance; and then jumped from the railing, and turned to go home. She now found she had strayed to an unknown region, and did not know which direction to take in order to reach her home; so she inquired the way of a person in the crowd, who directed her along Pall Mall as the best route, and then advised her to ask again when she reached a certain point of the street.

The child hurried off in a straight line until she came to the end of Waterloo Place, when, turning her head, she caught sight of the opening to the park.

Zerneen was very tired by this time, and thought she would have a rest.

She had not been there long when a lady came and sat down beside her. It was the same person who had admired her so much in Pall Mall, and who had, unperceived, or at least unnoticed, followed her here.

Zerneen just gave a glance at the new comer, and then went on eating her cake.

'Are you not cold in that thin jacket, my dear?' presently inquired the lady, who was herself wrapped up with all due regard to warmth and comfort.

'I'm used to the cold, ma'am, and don't mind it much,' replied the girl, shaking back her raven hair, and fixing her brilliant eyes on the face of her interrogator. Then, addressing the child again—

'Would you not like to live in a beautiful house, my dear, and have servants to wait on you, and nice hot dinners, and pretty clothes, and ride sometimes in a carriage?'

The little girl looked bewildered.

'Yes!' she cried, in a tone of rapture; 'but who would give a girl like me all these fine things?'

'I would, if you would be my little girl, and love me as your mamma, and never go away from me.'

'But what would become of Eola, my cousin?'

The lady looked perplexed.

'Well, she said, in a hesitating tone.—'You see if I took you for my little daughter and gave you all these luxuries, I could not afford to do the same by your cousin; but I could do something for her—get her some employment.'

'But you will do something for my cousin, she added. 'And I may see her sometimes if I come to live with you, may'nt I?'

'Yes,' returned the lady, 'I dare say I

shall be able to arrange all that.

'Very well; I will send to her.'

'What! Ain't I to go back to her before I come along with you?—not even to say good-bye!'

'Well, no, you can't very well, my dear. I'm going out of town early to-morrow, and if you do not come with me, I shall not have time to fetch or send for you before I go; and before I return to London a thousand unforeseen events may occur to you that may place you forever beyond my reach, and then my little intended daughter would be lost to me;'

'Then, if I go, you will send to Eola? she asked.

'Yes, I will,' responded the lady.

'But you don't know her name yet,' said the girl, half suspiciously; for, in spite of her ignorance of the world, instinct seemed to convey to her heart some vague sense of evil.

'What is your cousin's name? I will note it down with the address in my pocket.'

'It is Leighton—Eola Leighton; and mine is Zerneen Shore.'

CHAPTER XIV.

The little man, before mentioned as having appeared greatly interested in the beautiful gipsy child, had likewise followed her footsteps to the park. He had seen the lady sit down beside her, and, unperceived by the latter, had contrived to place himself near enough to the spot where they sat to overhear the entire conversation that passed between them.

When they departed he followed them.

He was a dark, sallow-complexioned man, of rather mean appearance, and apparently about thirty years of age. He was particularly sharp and acute in his movements, and walked with a light, springy step, and somehow associated itself in the beholder's mind with the stage, and gave the impression that Monsieur Vantini must be in some way connected with the 'corps de ballet.' This idea was not an erroneous one.

Monsieur Vantini was 'maitre de danse' at a theatre.

The benevolent lady, whose philanthropic affection had opened to the little gipsy's view so fair a future, turned her steps towards Buckingham Gate, cautiously followed by her pretty protegee, who, however, took considerable pains to appear as if she knew nothing, and cared about as much, for the elegant being in whose wake she trod.

At a little distance behind the child, and also sedulously avoiding the appearance of following any one, strolled Vantini.

In this way they proceeded down Victoria Road, and part of Belgrave Road, off which they turned into a street on the right.

But now the thoroughfares were become quieter and less frequented, and Vantini had to exercise a good deal of caution to avoid notice, the blue bonnet being turned several times in a backward direction to ascertain the safety of the scarlet frock. So Vantini slackened his pace and walked at a greater distance, till, after travelling two or three streets and squares, the lady paused before a pretentious-looking house in—Street, and rang the door-bell.

As Vantini passed on the opposite side, he saw the summons answered by a tall flunkey, in a smart livery; and when the lady and her charge had disappeared behind the portal, the maitre de danse turned back, carefully noticed the number of the house they had entered, and then walked hastily away. He retraced his steps to the park, traversed the Mall, passed through Spring Gardens, and crossing over to the Strand, made his way to his own habitation, the second-floor of a house in—Street, Adelphi.

In the small, but not badly-furnished apartment, used as a sitting-room, was a dark, good-looking woman, seated before a cozy tea-table, apparently awaiting the arrival of her husband to commence operations on the afternoon's repast.

'Well, Mira, I've kept you waiting, I see,' said the little man, as he took his vacant seat by the fire-side, while his spouse proceeded to perform the duties of the tea-table.

'Yes; I've been expecting you ever so long. What has kept you?'

'I've been to Pimlico.'

'Pimlico! And pray what business took you there?'

'Well, I suppose you will say, when I tell you, no business of my own. The fact is, I've witnessed such a shameful proceeding on the part of an old woman, that you'd scarcely believe it.'

'What was it?'

'Oh, an affair something like that German girl's, that made such a stir a short time back.'

CHAPTER XV.

We will now return to Zerneen.

On entering the elegant residence of her new mamma, she was much struck and considerably dazzled by its appearance, as displayed through the half-open doors of several apartments which they passed on their way to the drawing room, whither the dear 'mamma' had invited the adopted one to follow her.

On reaching this apartment, the kind lady bade the child sit down on an ottoman near the fire, and warm herself, while she (mamma) went to give some orders respecting her to the servants. Zerneen obeyed, well pleased with the opportunity thus afforded her to inspect the many wonders of the beautifully-furnished room, without the restraint of her protectress's presence, and was about to commence her voyage of discovery, when the sound of voices, apparently in altercation, proceeding from behind some folding doors at the extremity of the apartment arrested her movements, and caused her to listen in silence.

'I tell you it is absurd,' said a strange voice, in an angry tone. 'We have enough on our hands now, without the addition of a puling baby to look after, and coax and humour.'

'But just stay till you have seen her; you'll think differently, then,' returned another voice, which Zerneen recognised as that of her new acquaintance.

'Well, just come and see the girl, and give your opinion after.'

'Where is she?'

'In the next room.'

But, as we have seen, Zerneen had heard the conversation, and discovered by it, greatly to her discomfort, that her new parent's affection was not of the disinterested kind which she had first supposed it to be.

'It is very plain,' thought the child, 'that I am expected to pay them for all they do; and though they talk about two years passing first, still it seems that, at the end of that time, I shall have to work hard enough for a month to make up for a whole year's idleness. Ah! that isn't at all a nice thought.'

At this moment the girl's reflections were interrupted by the entrance of the two women. The one whom she saw for the first time was a stout, middle-aged woman, possessing the remains of great beauty, but rendered coarse and ungraceful by a life of too much idleness and ease. This personage approached the child, looked searchingly at her from head to foot, then, turning to her companion, said—

'You are right, Hilda; she is all that you say.'

'Take this child,' she said to the servant, 'and tell Emma to make her decent for dinner. Tell her to hunt up some of Miss Evelyn's things; they will fit her, I dare say.'

And Zerneen silently withdrew with the man, who conducted her to an apartment above, where a young woman was engaged in needlework.

The servant delivered his message, and the woman rose, and proceeded to execute it without a remark.

'Who is Miss Evelyn?' inquired Zerneen, on being attired in a pretty silk dress, apparently belonging to a girl of her own size.

'Mrs. Melnott's daughter,' returned the servant.

'And where is she?' cried Zerneen, her spirits rising at the idea of having a new companion of her own age.

'At school,' was the short response.

'Oh,' sighed the gipsy girl, with a melancholy smile.

But perceiving that her attendant did not manifest any desire to continue the conversation, she refrained from asking any more questions, and underwent the remainder of the dressing operations in mute wonder.

At length, after having her slender figure pinched and pushed into a tight silk frock, her feet and legs encased in delicate shoes and stockings, and her long black curls unmercifully combed and pulled, the tartarian Emma remarked that 'she would do,' and taking her by the hand, led her back to the drawing-room, opened the door, just pushed her inside, and then retired, leaving the hesitating child blushing and trembling on the threshold.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)